GEOGRAPHIC NEWS BULLETIN

Prepared Weekly by

THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

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General Headquarters, Washington, D. C.

for

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Education

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THE SERENADE

Music is considered a necessity, not a luxury, by the Italian people

HOW TO OBTAIN THE BULLETIN

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Pisa: An Old Curiosity Shop of History

A CITY of 10,000 skyscrapers before Peter Minuit bought Manhattan Island for the present price of a supper at a Broadway cabaret—

A city that warred and traded with empires, yet plunged into a disastrous struggle with a rival city over the rights to a lapdog—

A city which was seized after a Florentine Hobson "bottled up" its harbor entrance with sunken boats six centuries before the battle off Santiago Bay.

Such is Pisa, whose leaning tower was endangered by recent earthquake tremors in Italy.

Pisa's record abounds in incidents as freakish as its famous tower; yet it possesses a history necessarily more significant than any British or American city. For the English-speaking town may be rich in municipal annals, but Pisa attained a national status and conquered coveted territory.

Among the Earliest Independent Italian Cities

A flourishing town when Rome was a very mean city indeed, it was nurtured during the heyday of the Empire, and was among the first of the Italian cities to emerge from that chrysalis into a robust independence.

Indicative of Pisa's importance in the thirteenth century was her sending an ambassador to Rome. Thereby hangs the story of the lapdog. During the coronation ceremonies of Frederick II the Florentine emissary admired the lapdog of a certain cardinal, so that dignitary promised to give the tiny animal to its admirer. Next day the Pisan ambassador said a few kind words about the same dog, and the cardinal just as readily promised it to him. The Florentine sent for his gift, and got it; the Pisan sent, and received an apology. Florentines began joking the Pisans about this incident, and fights ensued on the Roman streets. When the Pisan home folks heard this it gave them an excellent chance to pick a quarrel that had long been simmering. A sort of medieval Boston Tea Party was staged by the Pisans, who seized all the enemy merchandise within their reach, and thus precipitated the first of a series of wars with Florence which culminated in the subjection of Pisa by her long-time rival.

Lapdog Story Illustrates a Trait of People

The lapdog story seems trivial, yet characteristic of a certain childish quality noticeable among the juvenile civic nationalities that preceded national Italy. As further proof one might recall the occasion when the victorious army of Lucca hung upon a Pisan tower a mirror with the inscription, "Oh, women of Pisa, use these to look at yourselves." No other challenge was needed for the Pisans to march to the gate of Lucca, and there to plant poles, topped with mirrors, bearing retaliatory comment.

During one of the wars between Florence and Pisa—William Dean Howells counted seven but admits he may have missed a few—the Florentines had chased

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LOADING WHEAT FOR EXPORT AT ODESSA, RUSSIA (See Bulletin No. 3)

Founded by Catharine the Great of Russia, in 1792, soon after the extension of the dominion of the Empire to the shores of the Black Sea, Odessa is a comparatively new city, and its aspect is that of a busy modern West Europe metropolis. Its famous boulevard of Nicholayevsky, lined with rows of over-arching trees, is one of the beauty spots of Russia. The city lies near the great rivers, the Dnieper and the Dniester, which made it, in normal times, one of the great grain-handling ports of the world.

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Caroline Islands: An Oceanic Museum

WHATEVER the political future of the Caroline Islands, which Japan seized from Germany, they are bound to be objects of scientific interest for generations to come.

Who built the massive stone structures which give evidence of a high degree of civilization at some prehistoric time?

What was the origin of the stone currency, some "coins" of which weigh five tons?

These are but two of the many questions which these Pacific Islands of mystery present.

Stone Ruins Extend to Island of Yap

The stone ruins extend from Ponape, an island toward the east of the group, to Yap,[1] on the west. Yap will be recalled as the island which figured so conspicuously in the peace treaty discussion because of the proposal to cede it to the United States.

On Yap are great stone terraces, embankments and roads, composed of neatly laid stone blocks, stone graves, stone platforms, and enormous chambers resembling council lodges with gables and tall pillars, frequently carved.

Ponape is the "Pacific Venice." There the ruins are partly submerged. Apparently they once stood on an island city, unless their site was connected with other islands before a terrific upheaval inundated them.

What remains today is more than half a hundred rectangular walled islets, projecting above the waters of a lagoon. There is an outer lagoon, separated by a breakwater three miles long. In all this construction huge basalt blocks were used. Apparently they were untouched by iron tools.

Recent study has confirmed the belief that these mighty megalithic monuments antedate the present native population of the Carolines.

Unwieldy Stones Serve as "Small Change"

Origin of the unique stone coinage is not known. Shell money seems to have supplanted the unwieldy stone discs for "small change" long before the white man arrived. The stone "money" is made from limestone or calcite. It probably was employed for primitive banking rather than for general circulation. Its security from theft was assured by its weight. Specimens are found piled about the homes of native chieftains.

Including reefs not inhabited, the Caroline islands number more than 500. Of the total land area of 390 square miles, 307 square miles is comprised in Ponape, Yap, Kusaie and Hogolu, or Truk. In 1911 the total population was about 55,000, and of these fewer than 400 were Europeans.

The islands extend for about 1,000 miles, east and west. They lie more than 1,500 miles to the east of the Philippines, and about 1,000 miles north of New Guinea.

[1] See also "The Island of Yap," Bulletin No. 3, December 1, 1919.

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the Pisans back to their own city. An eagle, revered by the Pisans as were wolves in Rome and lions in Florence, escaped to the enemy camp. The bird was killed, dragged back to Florence, and there great was the rejoicing over the omen of Pisa's capture.

Early Prototype of New York Sky Line

Were a super Rip Van Winkle of medieval Pisa to come with his latter-day compatriots to Ellis Island in 1920, not only the national bird of his adopted land, but the skyscraper line of New York might make him feel at home.

Towers they were called, these Pisa skyscrapers, huddled together for all the world like groups of tall apartment houses. Two reasons are assigned for this method of building, common to Italian towns of the twelfth century. One was that the walls permitted only vertical expansion when population pressure increased. Another, believable in view of the constant factional fights and family feuds, attributed them to the necessity for protection.

Bridges that could be thrown from tower to tower further suggested the skyscraper likeness. On these precursors of the modern fire escape many a community battle has raged. To quote one vivid description: "Mangonels, or catapults, huge engines stationed on the roofs of the towers, sent masses of stone hurtling through the air, whistling arbelast bolts and clothyard shafts flew in thick showers, boiling oil or lead rained down on the heads of those who ventured down to attack the doors, and arrows, with greek fire attached, were shot with nice aim into the wooden balconies and bridges. The shouts and shrieks of the combatants were mingled with the crash of a falling tower or with the hissing of a fire-arrow. Where those struck, a red glow arose and a thick cloud of smoke enveloped the defenders."

Leaning Tower of Pisa a Valuable Municipal Advertisement

All of which goes to prove that Pisa's interest lies far deeper than the architectural curiosity that has made it famous. Even the leaning Tower of Pisa served humanity well, aside from becoming the most effective bit of city advertising yet devised, for it permitted Galileo, a native of Pisa, to carry on his experiments with the laws governing the pendulum.

Moreover, the tower is but one part of what has been called the "most famous group of architecture in the world, after that of St. Mark's Palace in Venice." The other parts are the Duomo, or cathedral, and the Baptistery. In the former still hangs the chandelier which, by its swaying, is said to have set Galileo to investigating the pendulum.

Picture Was Veiled for Centuries

Both these noble piles contain relics that recall events of Pisa's composite history. One art piece, the Santa Maria Sotto gli Organi (St. Mary Under the Organ), so called from its position, is known to have been in Pisa since the thirteenth century. The picture has been conspicuous in services and in processions, yet it is believed that no eye saw it from that time until December 13, 1789. There is a tradition, recalling the experience of those who profaned the Biblical ark, that all who tried to lift its veils were stricken.

When a severe earthquake shook Pisa in 1846 this Madonna was solemnly crowned in thanksgiving for the city's escape. Even now the picture is unveiled only in times of great distress.

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Odessa: Paris of the Ukraine[1]

BEFORE the war no city of the Near East, save Bucharest, so nearly resembled Paris and Vienna in its hectic night life as did Odessa, conspicuous in the fighting of Ukrainians, Poles and Bolsheviki.

Odessa had hundreds of sidewalk cafes, its municipal opera, and its palaces of chance. It had more than half a million population, yet it is one of the newest cities in Europe. Moscow's history extends over a thousand years, that of Odessa only a little beyond a century.

There is a unique analogy between Odessa and the capital city of the United States. Both were started at about the same time—during the last decade of the eighteenth century—and both were begun because of the far-seeing wisdom of the chief executives of the two nations.

Points in Common With United States Capital City

Perhaps the oddest coincidence is the fact that they both were planned by foreign civil engineers of the same nation. While Major L'Enfant was devising the "city of magnificent distances" to be erected on the banks of the Potomac, Voland, also a Frenchman, laid out Odessa on the shores of the Black Sea. While President Washington was dreaming into being the beautiful city which bears his name, Czarina Catharine the Great was sponsoring the upbuilding of a municipal stepping stone toward the chief object of the Russian Bear's stealthy tread—Constantinople.

Like Washington, D. C., Odessa was laid out in the midst of a virtual wilderness and swamp. An isolated Turkish fort, Khaji-Bey, stood on the site of the present city at the time, 1789, when it passed to Russia. In early years of the Christian era Greek colonists had taken advantage of the Bay of Odessa.

New Railway Reduces Time to Moscow

Until five years ago the railway distance between Odessa and Moscow was more than a thousand miles, but a new line, via Bakhmatch, reduced that distance to 814 miles. The steamship distance between Odessa and Constantinople is 360 miles.

From its history it is evident why Odessa was far from a typical Russian city. Mark Twain found the only Russian things about it to be the shape of the droshkis and the dress of the drivers. He might have mentioned the gilded domes of a few churches. There the Russian likeness ends.

A few miles to the north and also to the southwest are three "limans," or lagoons, famous for mudbaths, believed to benefit persons with rheumatism, gout and skin diseases. The most popular of these is 20 miles long, a mile wide, 10 feet deep and lies 16 feet below the level of the Black Sea.

[1] See also "Kiev: The Mart and the Shrine of Russia," Bulletin No. 3, October 18, 1920.

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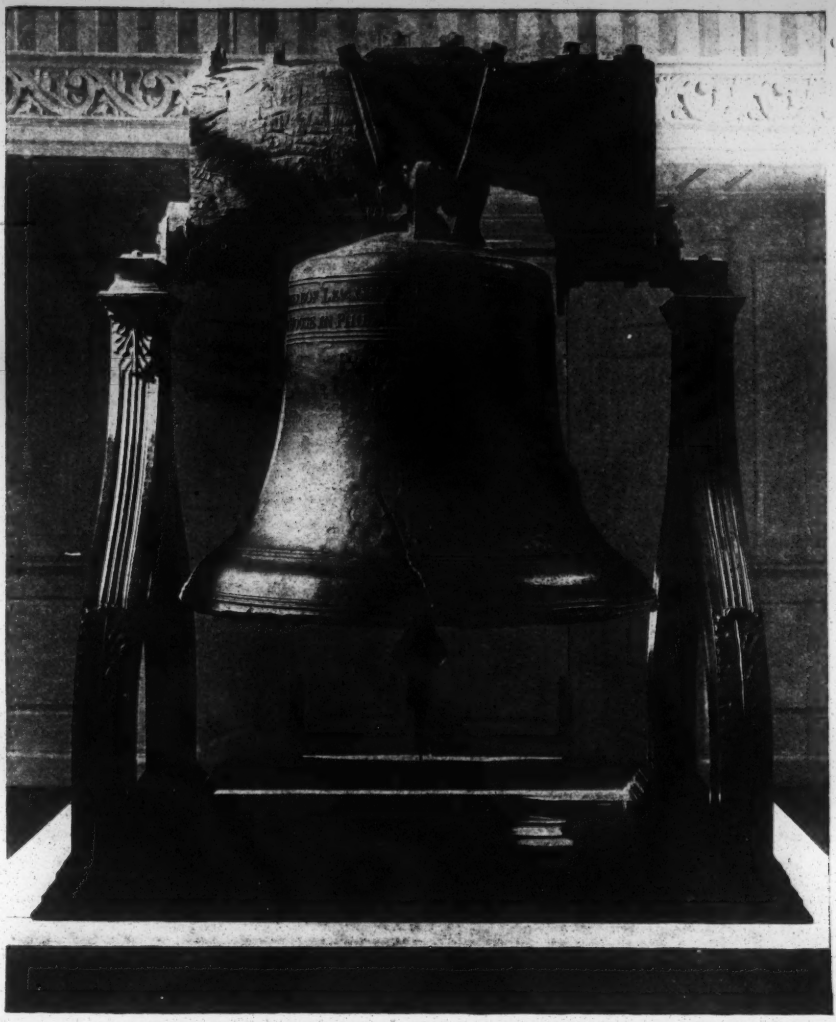

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THE LIBERTY BELL IN INDEPENDENCE HALL: PHILADELPHIA (See Bulletin No. 5)

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The Original Skyscraper Churches

PLANS to erect in an American city a "skyscraper church," to be used both as a place of worship and an office building, recall that the ancient monasteries of Thessaly are nature-made skyscrapers, reached by unique elevators. In a communication to the National Geographic Society Elizabeth Perkins describes these structures of the Greek Church as follows:

"There is a legend, perhaps it is history, that there was once a ruler in Constantinople who disliked his brother and wished to banish him to the remotest corner of his kingdom. Consequently the monarch built a monastery on a well-nigh inaccessible mountain in Thessaly and founded a brotherhood, about 400 years ago, in what seemed to be the uttermost corner of the earth.

"The Domicile of the Sky"

"The monastery was called 'Meteora,' meaning 'domicile of the sky.' After the original was built, twenty-three others grouped themselves around and were inhabited for a while. They were, however, finally abandoned, with the exception of three which are still in use.

"The seven hours' trip across the plains of Thessaly to the town of Kalabaka is most enchanting. Occasionally a Greek priest, with long beard, long hair, and long garments rides by. His high hat and his large cross indicate prominently his calling, and, if he is not in too great a hurry, a pedestrian may stop him, kiss his cross, and be touched on the forehead with a little switch, presumably dipped in holy water, and the sinner obtains absolution for the day.

"We left the train at Kalabaka, and there took horses and guides to climb to the high-built monasteries. For three hours the horses had to pick their way over hillsides where, in the month of February, no trail was visible.

Monasteries Perched Upon Dizzy Precipices

"As we looked in wonder at one detached colossal pillar of stone, we discovered on its seemingly unattainable summit a building. This habitation of man, half natural rock and half artificial, seemed most extraordinary. Our guides drew attention to the higher precipices, and as we grew accustomed to their outlines we saw, on all sides, monasteries tucked into the ledges of the perpendicular walls. They are not all inhabited today, but they are there, bearing testimony that man has climbed, and built, and lived on crags that seem impossible for goats to climb.

"The whole of the west plain of Thessaly lay at our feet, and the white mountains of the Pindus range rose rugged and imposing before us. At the base of the rock on which Trinity is perched, like an eagle's nest, our guides hallooed and beat with a stick on a tin can, found in the bushes. Soon an answering call came back, and over the precipice, some three hundred feet above us, the peering faces of several monks were seen. Then something

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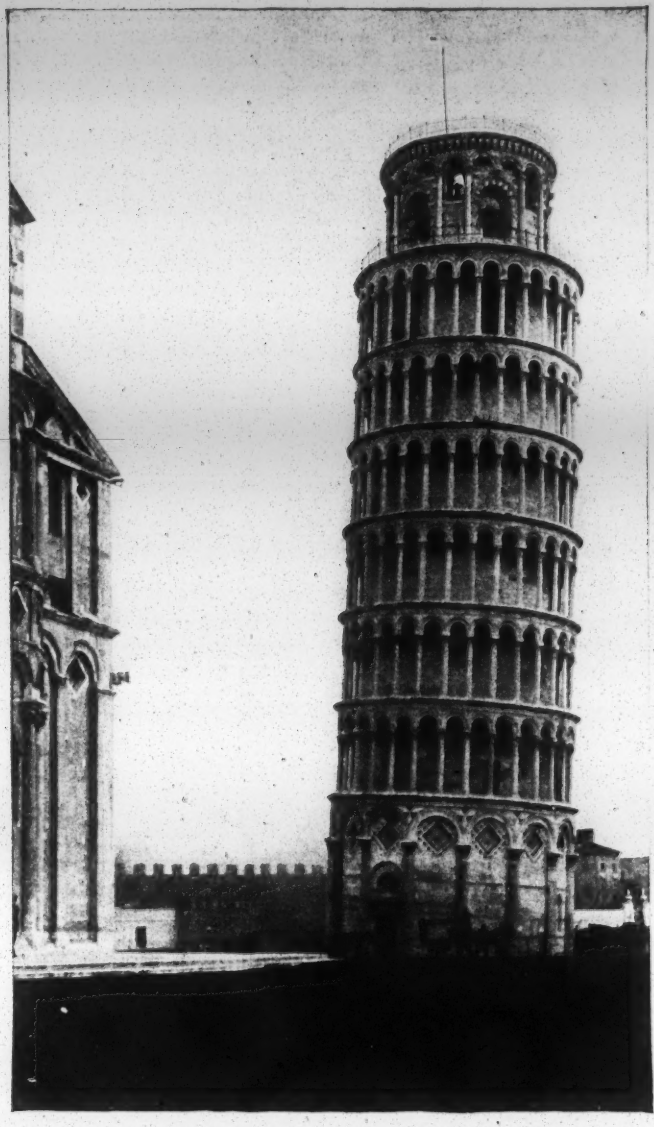

THE LEANING TOWER OF PISA (See Bulletin No. 1)

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A Musical Adventure For America

NEWSPAPER dispatches state that there is a plan afoot to have a National Carillon in Washington, D. C., as a tribute to the soldier dead.

Contact with the men and women of Flanders has directed American attention to one kind of music, vital in the national lives of these people, which cannot even be heard in this country.

We have welcomed Italian tenors, Austrian violinists, Russian pianists, and French and German orchestra leaders, but we have evinced no interest in the Belgian carillonneur nor have we, within the confines of our country, one mechanical instrument whereby we could demonstrate his music.

Bell Ringers Challenged German Troops

Soon from a high tower vibrant bells may waft over Washington at twilight such strains as have for centuries rung out from the towers of Belgium and Holland on days of national festivity or crisis, and which, in 1914, challenged the Germans from such carillons as those of Louvain, Antwerp, Bruges, Malines, or Ghent with defiant "Brabanconnes" as the invaders approached their gates.

A carillon is made up of a set of tower bells attuned to the intervals of the chromatic scale, usually covering a range of four octaves. To attain such a range the bell producing the lowest note must weigh several tons, while the smallest scarcely weighs 20 pounds. The bells are connected to a keyboard or to a clockwork mechanism, which causes their clappers to strike.

Musicians Who May Require Gymnastic Training

Producing music from the bells requires great skill and dexterity on the part of the bellmaster, for he must use his feet for the larger bells, and the muscles of both his wrist and elbow are brought into play in producing the tremolando effect usually given. A fine carillon is not the result of a chance moulding of metal, but its making is as much an achievement wrought by a wise combination of excellent material and deep thought as a Stradivarius. Lovers of carillon music compare the tones to those of a pianaforte in delicacy and to an organ in majesty. When touched by the hand of a master like Denyn, the wizard of Malines, the music seems to come veritably from the heavens and to settle in peace and benediction over the surrounding country.

During the war the Germans melted down many of the Belgian carillons for munitions, dealing their enemies an even more cruel blow in humiliation than in the actual physical ill done to them. Many an old Flemish woman who had spun all day, and many an old man who had labored in fields whose crops would be confiscated to feed German troops, felt loneliness and a desolating silence creep over them at twilight without their beloved bells.

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serpentine flew into the air, and as it dropped perpendicularly we saw dangling from the coil of rope what looked like a small fish net. Down came the cable until it touched the earth at our feet, and the fish net proved to be a large sized rope bag, which opened and spread out flat on the ground.

"One at a time we were invited to step into the middle of this net and squat, Turk-fashion. The edges were gathered together onto a large iron hook, a shout was given, and the net soared upward, while its occupant felt somewhat like an orange at the bottom of a market woman's bag.

A Three-Minute Elevator Ride to Top

"The ascent takes just three minutes. Occasionally the openwork elevator swings into the rock with a slight bump, but the monks at the top wind the windlass slowly; and the bumping does not hurt, but as a compensation the view grows more beautiful every second. At last the top was reached. There was a final swing outward, to get a rebound inward, several pairs of hands were outstretched to pull the net over to the platform, and then came a drop onto the stone floor! The hook was detached, the meshes opened, and the passenger helped to her feet by the black-robed brothers. They all gathered around with words of welcome and hands ready to be shaken in greeting.

"All we had to offer in return for their hospitality were some American postcards. The Flatiron Building caused much unintelligible comment, but also the perfectly understandable remark that 'this must be the Meteora of America.' Our red-haired friend also made us understand the superiority of the original Meteora in having a net bag to facilitate the mounting. Alas! we could not make him understand the greater superiority of an electric lift."

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A STREET CORNER IN ITALY (See Bulletin No. 1)

Boys and men wear a soft, round black hat; women and little girls, a small shawl folded into a square

Poets Responsive to Lure of Bells

So closely has this love of bell music grown into the national life of the people of the Low Countries of Europe that it has lured to their shores poets and writers from other lands. Longfellow and Robert Louis Stevenson paid tributes to their silvery tones, and, to Victor Hugo's imaginative mind, the spirit of the Carillon of Mechlin became personified as a dancer scattering magic notes on a sleeping world as she tripped from the heavens down a crystal staircase. To the people who live within the shadows of these towers, the bells possess a personal as well as an historic significance for having been connected with some stirring event. Many of the peasants are connoisseurs of bell music and can tell the names and tones of the individual bells in a carillon.

From the even rows of red-topped roofs and the trees of the surrounding level spaces in Malines, the immense flat-topped Gothic spire of St. Rombauld once arose. The cathedral dated from the thirteenth century and has for hundreds of years been known the world over for the remarkable silvery quality of its bells. So much attention had been given to making it the best of its kind that its bell makers gained wide reputations and the town itself became the headquarters of bell-founding.

Eight Men Required to Ring This Bell

The tower, vast and mysterious against the luminous sky, seemed to dominate the city. While compelling the attention it stirred the imagination as it kept watch over Malines and tolled the passing of the hours with its hugest bell. When not attached to the wonderful mechanism that controlled the ringing of the carillon, this bell required eight men to ring it. The range of the bells of this carillon was great enough to admit of many difficult operatic selections. Today the majestic tower mingles its dust with that of the ruined city which it had for centuries guarded.

The carillon of Antwerp possessed the greatest number of bells of any in Flanders—sixty-five. It has been said that from the cathedral tower on a clear morning 126 carillons could be seen. High above the heads of puny mortals they held converse with each other in clear vibrant tones or melodious whispers.

Of the once quaint, squatty church of St. Martin, at Dixmude, not one stone remains upon another to tell of its solemnity and exquisite Gothic beauty, or to suggest the tower from which its harmonies drifted.